

DIONYSOS IN THE UNDERWORLD AN INTERPRETATION OF THE TOLEDO KRATER

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In an *addendum* to an article on the then newly published Pelinna gold leaves, Fritz Graf draws attention to a newly published Apulian volute krater attributed to the Darius painter, now in the Toledo Museum of Art (Ohio, USA), whose motif, in his view, reveals an eschatology that "comes very close to what [the Pelinna gold leaves] presuppose, Dionysus interceding with the powers beyond on behalf of his initiate" (fig. 1).¹ The initiate in question is argued to be the young man depicted on the reverse side of the vase, standing inside an aedicula which is surrounded by young men and women probably in mourning. This side, the reverse, according to Graf, is connected to the obverse where we see a unique scene from the Underworld: Dionysos approaching and shaking hands with Hades. Hades is seated inside his house together with a standing Persephone who is holding a torch-cross with both hands. Dionysos, wearing a fawnskin cloak with a narthex staff in his left hand, is followed by his *thiasos*, comprised here of two maenads, one, Acheta, is dancing while holding a tambourine and a *thyrsos*, the other, Persis, slowly approaches the house of Hades holding a torch and a *thyrsos*. Seated between Persis and the house of Hades we find the satyr Oinops clutching a drinking horn. Elsewhere on the obverse are depicted various inhabitants of Hades, such as Kerberos and Hermes Psychopompos, and figures known from myths

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¹ Graf 1993:256. The krater, Toledo 1994.19 henceforth the Toledo krater, is dated to c. 340-330 B. C. See Trendall and Cambitoglou 1992:508 for a description of the vase. For a picture of the vase see Moret 1993:294-9 or the cover of Edmonds 2004. The Pelinna leaves were found in a woman's grave dating from the end of the fourth century, see Tsantsanoglou and Parassoglou 1987. On these, and other gold leaves, are found miniscule letters forming a text connected to the deceased's passage from life to death.

about Dionysos such as Pentheus, Agave (leaning lightly against a fountain) and Aktaion.²



Fig. 1, the Toledo krater (after Edmonds, 2004)

Why is Dionysos depicted in the Underworld? In myth we are told that Dionysos once visited Hades in order to lead his mother, Semele, from the realm of the Dead up to Olympus. Hades agrees and Semele is given a seat among the Olympian Gods in the guise of her new name Thyone.³ Graf briefly considers that the scene on the vase

² All persons on this side of the vase are named except Kerberos and a *paniskos* holding a tambourine approaching him.

³ This myth is found in many ancient authors: Diod. 4.25.4; Apollod. 3.5.3; Plut. *De sera num. vind.* 27.566a; Plut. *Quaest. Gr.* 12.293cd; Paus. 2.31.2, 2.37.5; schol. *Ar. Ran.* 330, references taken from Moret 1993:301n21. The other of Dionysos' *katabasis* is found in Aristophanes *The Frogs* where the god descends to Hades in order to bring his favourite author Euripides back from the dead. It is difficult to argue that it is this episode which is depicted on the vase since the Dionysos in the play never actually meets Hades. Besides, the names engraved on the vase does not appear in *The Frogs*. Dionysos also appears in the Underworld in hymn 53 of the Orphic hymns. Here it is said that the chthonic Dionysos sleeps in Hades and puts to sleep the pure. However the chronological gap between the hymns (second

may reflect the myth of Dionysos and Semele, but his main point is the eschatological connection between it and the narrative found on the Pelinna gold leaves. Jean-Marc Moret argues that it is improbable that the scene has anything to do with this myth since Semele is absent.⁴ Instead Moret follows Graf in discussing the possible relations to the gold leaves of Pelinna. Sarah Iles Johnston and Timothy J. McNiven devoted an article to this relationship and also suggest that the scene on the krater is connected to Orphic-Dionysiac eschatology by reflecting the text of the Pelinna leaves.⁵

The two gold leaves from Pelinna were published in 1987 and in many ways confirmed the connection between the corpus of gold leaves (excavated and published since the middle of the nineteenth century) and Dionysiac cults.⁶ This link had been first hinted at in the Hipponion plate, published in 1974, where the deceased owner is promised that he will join the other *mystai* (initiates) and *bakkhoi* (Bacchic initiates) on the mystic path (in Hades).⁷ In the Pelinna leaves the decisive clue was found in the texts' first two lines: "Now you have died and now you have been born, thriceblessed, on this day | Tell Persephone that Bakkhios himself has released you".⁸ Moreover, both plates were shaped like ivy leaves, indicating a strong connection to Dionysos.⁹ Furthermore, these new texts combine elements from the

century A. D.) and the Toledo krater and the fact that Dionysos is wide awake on the vase speaks against any connection between the two.

⁴ Moret 1993:301.

⁵ The authors do not themselves use the term "Orphic-Dionysiac eschatology", but it is, I think, implied. Consider for example their focus on Dionysos as the saviour and their mention of "Orphic belief" and use of "Orphic sources" in order to support their interpretation, Johnston and McNiven 1996:25, 34. "Orphic belief" will be discussed shortly.

⁶ The first gold plate, probably from Petelia, was published in 1836 and since then their number has increased steadily creating an evergrowing corpus of similar gold leaves. Today there are over fifty published gold leaves, however only sixteen of these contain longer narratives. The remaining leaves contain the name of the deceased, his or her title (normally *mystes*) and/or the name of a specific deity connected to the Underworld (Hades, Persephone, Dionysos, Eukles, Eubouleus).

⁷ Foti and Pugliese Carratelli 1974. B10.15-16: καὶ δὴ καὶ συχνὸν ἡοδὸν ἔρχεα <ι> ἁν τε καὶ ἄλλοι | μύσται καὶ βά(κ)χοι ἱερὰν στείχουσι κλεινοί.

⁸ νῦν ἔθανες καὶ νῦν ἐγένου, τρισόλβιε, ἄματι τῶιδε | εἶπεῖν Φερσεφόναι ὅτι Β<άκ>χιος αὐτὸς ἔλυσε. The text on the two Pelinna leaves are virtually identical.

⁹ Before these finds most scholars denied this connection: "They do not refer to Dionysos", Nilsson 1975: 122n12; "No "chthonian Dionysos", then, can be assumed to have met the bearers of the Gold Leaves in the realm of Persephone",

two major groups of which the corpus of gold plates is comprised.¹⁰ This has made some scholars, such as Susan Guettel Cole and Walter Burkert, argue that the whole corpus springs from various Dionysiac cults whose members "had common beliefs about the afterlife."¹¹

The main interpretation, put forth by Graf, Moret, and Johnston and McNiven, then, is that Dionysos on the Toledo krater is making some kind of deal with Hades in order to protect his initiate, the young man depicted on the reverse side of the vase. By making this deal Dionysos is assuming the same role he has in the Pelinna leaves where the deceased, on arriving in Hades, is to remind the Queen of the Underworld of this arrangement. The conclusion is that the owner of the Apulian volute krater shared "common beliefs about the afterlife" with the dead woman from Pelinna in whose grave the Pelinna gold leaves were found. If so "the Toledo vase provides the first artistic illustration of eschatological doctrines referred to by the gold tablets".¹² I will argue against this view as being the only possible one and subsequently propose another interpretation of the scene which is just as likely.

Dionysiac cults

The worship of Dionysos has long roots in Greek Religion. The earliest evidence of a Dionysiac cult is found in Olbia, located on the northern coast of the Black Sea, c. 500 B. C. Here in 1951 a series of bone plates bearing among other things the abbreviated name of Dionysos was found. In these bone plates, Dionysos appears together with the sequence Life-Death-Life, thus in some way he is connected with eschatological beliefs.¹³ Turning to the necropolis of Cumae in

Zuntz 1971:411. I nevertheless agree with Zuntz in his insistence that the bearers of the gold leaves never anticipated to meet Dionysos in the Underworld.

¹⁰ In the A-plates the deceased are approaching the Queen of the Underworld, Persephone, but also hailing other deities such as Eukles and Eubouleus (A1-3,5.1-2). The plates express a hope of attaining a god-like status by claiming that the owner of the plates belongs to a divine lineage (A1-3.3; A4-5.4; A1.9) and has paid "the price with respect to unjust deeds" (A2-3.4) or suffered (A1.4; A4.3). The B-plates describes a journey in Hades where the owner of the plate is given advice on where to go and what to say when confronted by the, unnamed, guardians of the lake of Mnemosyne. Plate C is yet to be deciphered.

¹¹ Cole 1993:276. "Thus the whole corpus of these remarkable documents can now finally be attributed to Bacchic mysteries.", Burkert 1993:259

¹² Johnston and McNiven 1996:35.

¹³ Rusyayeva 1978:89. For a short resumé of Rusyayeva's article in German see Tinnefeld 1980:67-71.

southern Italy we find a fifth century B. C. inscription forbidding anyone not initiated as a *bakkhos* to be buried within a specific section.¹⁴ Also from the Classical period we have the gold leaves.¹⁵ This has made Versnel, as well as Henrichs, conclude that the goal of the Dionysiac cults of the Classical period was "the posthumous bliss of those initiated into the secrets of the cult."¹⁶

Although it is believed that the cults shared some beliefs their widespread occurrence, in both a geographical and chronological sense, makes it probable that we will encounter differences in the way people related to Dionysos in eschatological matters. We should not take for granted that they shared any concrete beliefs or doctrines other than the fact that they relied, to a greater or lesser degree, on Dionysos to make the transition from life to death as easy as possible. As Albert Henrichs stresses, "The so-called 'religion of Dionysus' is a convenient modern abstraction, the sum total of the god's numerous facets, symbols and cults. Dionysus had no central priesthood, no canonical books, and not even a panhellenic shrine of his own. His cults were regional and emphasized different aspects of the god."¹⁷ This means that even though the local Dionysiac cults were very organized "[i]nformation about religious contacts between worshippers of Dionysus in different regions is scarce."¹⁸ This can be illustrated by referring to the bone plates of Olbia (with their mention of Dionysos who is somehow connected with the cycle of life as well as with the *orphikoi*¹⁹ who are named as such for the first time in the ancient material), the gold plate from Hipponion (which mentions the *bakkhoi*, but not Dionysos and there is certainly no mention of *orphikoi* or Orpheus, but of Mnemosyne, and where the deceased is called a son of Gaia and

¹⁴ S.E.G. 4.92: οὐ θέμις ἐν- | τοῦθα κεῖσθ- | αὶ ἰ με τὸν βε- | βαχχεθμέ- | νον. For a drawing of the inscription see Bottini 1992:59.

¹⁵ The Hipponion plate was probably written c. 400 B. C. while the rest of the gold leaves date from the late Classical or the early Hellenistic period. Plate A5 from Rome, however, is from the second century A. D.

¹⁶ Versnel 1990:152. "By the fifth century at the latest there are Bacchic mysteries which promise blessedness in the afterlife.", Burkert 1985:294.

¹⁷ Henrichs 1983:151. This is also pointed out by Cole: "the individuals who practiced what we call Bacchic mysteries may not always have shared the same expectations.", Cole 1993:281.

¹⁸ Henrichs 1983:152. According to H. S. Versnel this lack of contact between cults or clubs in the Hellenistic period is to be expected, Versnel 1990:142.

¹⁹ Rusyayeva 1978:89. Martin West however reads ΟΡΦΙΚΩΝ instead, West 1982:21-22. This debate is not important for us here.

Ouranos), and the inscription in Cumae (belonging to a necropolis in which we have found no gold leaves or anything else that suggests that its inhabitants shared any concrete eschatological thoughts with the Hipponion cult).²⁰

The differences in Dionysiac eschatology are also seen when we examine the evidence from a chronological perspective. Cole, on the basis of her examination of Dionysiac epitaphs, argues that "the definite promise of a special status for the Bacchic initiate in the afterlife is missing in the later Dionysiac material dated after the third century B. C."²¹ It seems rather that most of the epigraphical material from the Hellenistic and Roman period concerns cult regulations, donations from private persons, budget, and various other practical issues.²² In grave epitaphs Dionysos is more often seen as a deity connected to the joys of life, especially in the form of wine, rather than as a deity securing a blissful afterlife for the dead soul.²³ Thus we see that Dionysos' power and sphere of influence are more related to life than to death in much of the later epigraphical evidence.²⁴ It is also striking that many of the epitaphs from the Hellenistic and Roman periods that actually relate the soul's journey to its rightful place among the blessed ones, the stars, in the heavens etc. do not mention Dionysos.²⁵ The exception to this is found in connection with children's graves. In the Roman period we see that the initiated dead child is promised a

²⁰ "There are, to my knowledge, no epitaphs saying that although earth hides the body of the Dionysiac initiate, the soul has found the special cypress tree, has drunk of the cool water of Memory, or has reached the road of the *bakkhoi*.", Cole 1993:292-3.

²¹ Cole 1993:278.

²² Cole 1993:279.

²³ Cole 1993:282. The orator Himerius, devastated by the death of his son, blames Dionysos for not having protected him, *Orationes* 8.7; 8.18.

²⁴ As Burkert points out Hellenistic ruler cults often used Dionysiac symbols when displaying their power and might before the people: "The experience of "epiphany" came to concentrate on the person of the ruler who had acted as a "saviour" and inaugurated an age of bliss and abundance—a process that easily assumed Dionysiac colouring. Royal display in the great parade took the form of a Dionysiac *pompe*.", Burkert 1993:268. The ruler, temporarily identified as Dionysos, thus acts as a protector of the people in life. Pausanias 8.19.2 provides us with an example when he explains the meaning of Dionysos Lysios as "the one who liberates man from chafing bonds and *daily sorrows*" (Tr. Peter Levi, my emphasis).

²⁵ For examples see Lattimore 1962:31-43.

place among Dionysos' thiasos even after death, but this seems to be a phenomenon restricted to children.²⁶

To return to our vase and Apulian vases in general it seems that we can not find any definite evidence for the influence of Dionysiac cults there either. This does not mean, however, that the vases lack eschatological motifs. Margot Schmidt, for example, interprets the decorations on the vases, especially the flowers inside the central naiskos and the flowery ornaments surrounding the scene, as a sign of the belief that "even though we do not yet understand its nature, life exists beyond the tomb."²⁷ However, even if this interpretation is correct we have no specific clues on the Apulian vases as to what kind of life awaited the dead beyond the grave, and certainly nothing specifically Dionysiac except for the unique appearance of the deity on the Toledo krater. This could seem rather strange considering the words of Sophokles claiming that Dionysos is the protector of Italy. Moreover, according to Livy, it was in the southern parts of Italy, in Campania, that the Bacchic organization which the Roman senate outlawed in 186 B. C. had its roots.²⁸ Schmidt suggests that scenes, such as the one on the reverse side of our vase, depicting a dead youth in a naiskos surrounded by young men and women, could represent the mourning for a fellow cult member since there seem to be no family members nearby.²⁹ It is, however, quite hard to draw any conclusion on this matter, as it all seems very uncertain.³⁰ There is no evidence for a general or specific Dionysiac cult or cults on the Apulian vases in the period we are concerned with here. Other evidence, such as the epigraphical which we have just considered

²⁶ At least to a certain degree. In the first century A. D. Plutarch writes that initiates of Dionysiac mysteries believed that there will be both rewards and punishments after death (*Cons. ad ux.* 10; *Mor.* 611d), and we have several funerary inscriptions on childrens' graves from the Roman imperial period saying that the dead child will be at the head of a dionysiac *thiasos* in Hades, see Cole 1993:288ff. These testimonies and that of Himerius contrast each other in this matter. There were probably no general or coherent dionysiac eschatology reserved for children, but rather several (or at least two) conflicting ones.

²⁷ Schmidt 1996:449. According to Heinz Günther Horn flowers were often used as a symbol of the happy afterlife, but then often in connection with Eros and Psyche and not with Dionysos, Horn 1972:20f.

²⁸ Soph. *Ant.* 1119; Livius 39.8-19.

²⁹ Schmidt 1996:449.

³⁰ "In some cases we can suppose, unfortunately without being absolutely certain, that echoes of the idea of the reincarnation cycle are also reflected in the pictures on Italiot vases.", Schmidt 1996:453.

briefly, also seems to confirm Henrichs' and Cole's view that one can not talk about *a* Dionysiac cult but rather about Dionysiac cults, emphasizing the differences between them rather than assuming a coherent common eschatology. The main common denominator for these cults was, I think, their reliance, to a greater or lesser extent, on Dionysos to guide and protect their lives in this world and/or the next. I turn now to the specific comparison of the two sources in question which has been proposed by Johnston and McNiven; the Pelinna gold leaves' narrative and the scene on the Toledo krater.

The gold leaves of Pelinna and the Toledo krater

The main problem with comparing the Toledo krater with the Pelinna gold leaves is that the scenes in the two sources are different. In the Pelinna leaves Dionysos is not present in the Underworld, the deceased only reminds Persephone of Dionysos' role as her releaser. On the Toledo krater however, Dionysos is approaching Hades while Persephone is portrayed as a spectator. The portrayed deities in the two sources simply do not correspond. Persephone, who has a peripheral position on the vase, is obviously the goddess who decides the destiny of the deceased in Hades according to the Pelinna leaves. The same emphasis on Persephone is found on four of the gold leaves found in Thurii in 1879. Here it is Persephone, called the Queen of the Underworld, who is addressed in the first line, while Hades and Dionysos are not mentioned, at least not by their most known names.³¹ Keep also in mind that Thurii was actually located in the Lucania region and thus bordering on Apulia. Thurii was an influential Greek

³¹ A1-3.1: ἔρχομαι ἐκ κοθαρῶν κοθαρά, χθονίων βασιλεια. Plate A4 is different, but in the last line Persephone is named explicitly: λειμώνας τε ἱεροῦς καὶ ἄλσεα Φερσεφονείας. In the second line of plates A1-3 the names Eukles and Eubouleus appear. The latter is taken as "Ein Name des Dionysos" by Merkelbach 1999:8n3 (referring to the Orphic hymns 18.12, 29.8, 30.6, 41.8, 42.2, 52.4, 72.3). Some ancient authors also identifies the two as one, Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 7.9.714c; Macrob. *Sat.* 1.18.12 (=OF 237 Kern). See also Zuntz 1971:310-11. But the identification need not be thus since the name was also attached to Zeus by ancient authors. In the Gûrob papyrus both Eubouleus (line 18) and Dionysos (line 23) appear separately. According to the lexicographer Hesychius Eukles was equated with Hades, Edmonds 2004:59n86. Zuntz further strengthens this equation by referreing to the Agnone tablet on which the god Euklúí paterí is hailed and who, according to Zuntz, is equivalent to Dis Pater, Lord of the Dead, i.e. Pluton/Hades, Zuntz 1971:310. Regardless of which deities is hiding behind these pseudonyms it is evident that the owners of the Thurii leaves laid a different emphasis on them than the cult in Pelinna did.

colony in the region so if we were to look for parallels between the scene on the Toledo krater and the gold leaves it would be natural to turn our attention to Thurii, but in these leaves the parallels are even vaguer.³² Johnston and McNiven admit that Persephone's position in the gold leaves counts against their interpretation of the vase, but they explain the handshake between Dionysos and Hades as being dictated by a demand for formality. This formality, they argue, could not have been expressed figuratively between Dionysos and Persephone since they were considered mother and son in "Orphic belief".³³ To this I have two objections. First, if formality dictates the scene on the Toledo krater then why not in the Pelinna leaves? Second, evidence for a coherent "Orphic belief" in this period is practically non-existent and there is nothing in the gold leaves that suggests that the gold leaves or the Toledo krater are products of Orphic beliefs. Furthermore this family relation is recorded in later sources such as the *Rhapsodies* which is dated to the first century B. C. or A. D.³⁴ Even in this period the opinions on the matter were obviously mixed. Consider e.g. hymn 44 of *The Orphic Hymns*, dating from the second or third century A. D., where Semele is praised as "mother of thyrsus-bearing and joyous Dionysos."³⁵ This means that the application of one cult's eschatological view, as the one presented in a very limited way on the Pelinna gold leaves, as the motif behind the scene of the Darius painter on our vase, is, on a general basis, difficult to uphold methodologically. We simply need more information in order to make such a bold assumption. The differences between the two sources are just too vast for them to be considered products of the same eschatology.

Instead of looking for parallels in the gold leaves I find it more promising to compare the Toledo krater to similar evidence from

³² Thurii, a panhellenic colony, was heavily influenced by Athens during the fifth century B. C. until the Peloponnesian War and it is thought that it was here and at Tarentum that the southern Italian red-figure style originated and spread to other regions sometime in the second half of the fifth century, see Schmidt 1996:444.

³³ Johnston and McNiven 1996:34f.

³⁴ The date of the *The Rhapsodies* is still disputed. Martin West, 1983:229, proposes that the Rhapsodic Theogony was written some time after the year 100 B.C. based on its metre, prosody, style and content. Luc Brisson, 1991:170, opts for a later date, around 100 A.D., since Chronos, the primordial deity in this Theogony, first makes his appearance in this period and probably was introduced into the Orphic theogony through the Roman Mithras cult.

³⁵ Tr. by Athanassakis, see Athanassakis 1977:61f. On the dating of the hymns see Athanassakis 1977:viif.

southern Italy. Turning to the clay tablets (*pinakes*) from Locri, dating from the first half of the fifth century B. C., we find Dionysos in a similar situation as that on our vase.³⁶ Most of these clay tablets were found inside a sanctuary dedicated to the joint cult of Persephone and Aphrodite and most of these are connected to Persephone although some of them belong to Aphrodite.³⁷ Most of these *pinakes* concern marriage, reflecting the main function of the sanctuary. *Pinakes* depicting Persephone can be divided into three series where one shows different variants of Hades' rape of Persephone, another shows Persephone and Hades seated in their realm, while the third shows various deities paying homage to the chthonic rulers of the Underworld. Two *pinakes* belonging to the latter series depict a standing Dionysos on the right side holding a *kantharos* and a vine facing a seated Persephone and Hades on the left.³⁸ This scene resembles the one on the Toledo krater except for the objects held by Dionysos. Also the cock, held in Persephone's left hand in the *pinakes*, is absent on the vase. This means that although the scene is quite similar it is possible that the reason for his visit to the Underworld on the Toledo krater is somewhat different than that on the *pinakes*. Sourvinou-Inwood argues that the two *pinakes* in question belong to a series revolving around Persephone and her involuntary descent into Hades and her subsequent enthronement as the Queen of the Underworld. The mood is, I would argue, quite different on the Toledo krater, where Persephone plays a peripheral role and no offerings from Dionysos are present. The vase then most probably depicts another myth in which Dionysos descends to Hades probably in order to pay his respects to the marriage of Hades and Persephone. This brings us back to the myth of Dionysos and Semele.

Dionysos and Semele

There are at least two good reasons for believing that the scene on the vase refers to this myth. First, this descent was widely known

³⁶ Moret 1993:300 discusses this connection, but nevertheless sees the *katabasis* on the two *pinakes* and the vase as belonging to dionysiac mythology and ritual without explaining further the nature of this connection or what is meant by "la mythologie et du rituel dionysiaques".

³⁷ See Sourvinou-Inwood 1974:132-4 for a discussion on the circumstances of the *pinakes* and bibliography. At Locri Persephone and Aphrodite coexisted in a single cult, see e.g. Prückner 1968:14.

³⁸ LIMC Hades 58 and 59 (the latter in a very fragmented state).

throughout the Greco-Roman world. The fact that only two other depictions of the myth are known today is not enough to dismiss this interpretation.³⁹ Since the scene is so unique in itself, the application of a motif from an "unpopular" myth is not improbable. Second, the absence of Semele is not enough to dismiss this interpretation either. In fact, by comparing the Toledo krater to vases where Orpheus is depicted I would argue that we can see a parallel. Orpheus in the Underworld is found on several Apulian vases attributed to the Underworld painter (figs. 2, 3).⁴⁰ Normally the scenes on these vases are quite similar to one another; Orpheus stands on the left side (sometimes on the right) of the house of Hades, easily recognizable with his lyre and Phrygian cap. Surrounding both the house of Hades and Orpheus are known figures connected to the Underworld such as Herakles, Kerberos, Minos, Aiakos, and Rhadamanthys (the three judges in Hades), Hermes, Sisyphos, the Danaides, and even the river Styx. The well-known myth of Orpheus and Eurydice makes it easy to assume that Orpheus is in the Underworld in order to revive his lover. But also here the object of the descent is absent. Where is Eurydice? My suggestion is that she is not present because Hades has not yet agreed to Orpheus' pleading. The only southern Italian vase depicting Orpheus and Eurydice together in the Underworld shows them as they are leaving for the upper world.⁴¹ Thus, the depiction of Orpheus in front of the house of Hades refers to an earlier stage in the myth in which Eurydice is still separated from her lover. A similar reading, I suggest, could easily be applied to the scene on our vase. Dionysos, then, has just made some kind of agreement with Hades concerning the return of his mother, but she has not yet appeared before her son. The descending party is not to see or meet the goal of the descent before an agreement has been reached with the lord of the Underworld, Hades. The hypothesis that such a consistent view of Hades existed in the works of two different painters is strengthened by the fact that the Underworld painter was a pupil of the Darius painter.⁴²

³⁹ According to Moret 1993:301 the myth is depicted on an attic black-figure vase (n24) and a tarentine terracotta disk (n25).

⁴⁰ e.g. LIMC Hades 126, 132, 133, 154, 156.

⁴¹ LIMC Hades 154. See also LIMC Orpheus 83 and 84 and discussion where Eurydice's presence has been argued for. However, the vases in question are so fragmentary that her presence is still very uncertain.

⁴² Trendall and Cambitoglou 1992:161.



Hades 132

Fig. 2, Orpheus in the Underworld (after *LIMC sv. Hades*)



Hades 154

Fig. 3, Orpheus in the Underworld (after *LIMC sv. Hades*)

The Toledo krater and Euripides' *Bacchae*

There is an additional feature on the vase that strengthens my interpretation, namely the three figures positioned on the right side of the house of Hades, Pentheus, Agave and Aktaion.⁴³ Among the approximately ten thousand Apulian vases recovered there is a wide variety of themes depicted. Prevalent among these are scenes taken from tragedies, the most popular being the ones written by Euripides. The three figures on the vase are taken from his *Bacchae*, which was initially performed posthumously in Athens around 407/6 B. C.⁴⁴ The obvious problem is that Dionysos never descends to Hades during Euripides' play, meaning that the scene on our vase does not correspond directly to a specific passage in the *Bacchae*. This, however, should not surprise us since, as has been observed by students of Apulian vases, the motifs chosen by the vase-painters rarely bore any direct resemblance to literary or theatrical sources. Instead the painters seem to have combined, and sometimes even manipulated, several themes and scenes from the tragedies in order to capture the main point of the tragedy in one scene.⁴⁵ The guidelines are not clear, but, as Oliver Taplin remarks, it was probably done through a combination of the painter's stylistic preferences and the local reperformance of the

⁴³ Johnston and McNiven suggest that their positioning on the right side, away from Dionysos and his entourage which is on the left, refers to their punishment in Hades while the maenads can await rewards, Johnston and McNiven 1996:27, 34f. However, as they point out themselves, the figures are not tortured or suffering. The reason for this, they argue, is that it "would have been representationally difficult and compositionally unpleasing for the painter, striving as he did for symmetry between the right and left sides of the scene.", Johnston and McNiven 1996:35n33.

⁴⁴ Pentheus and Agave are of course among the main figures in the play. Aktaion appears in a speech given by Kadmos to Pentheus where he refers to Aktaion's death, for his boasting that he was a better hunter than Artemis, and warns that the same will happen to Pentheus if he does not acknowledge Dionysos as a true God, Eur. *Bacch.* 337-42. The most popular scene depicted on fourth century Apulian vases from this tragedy is the death of Pentheus.

⁴⁵ An example of the manipulation or changing of a scene is given by Taplin 1993:22 where he discusses a scene on an Apulian vase depicting Medea in a chariot while the bodies of her children is left behind, whereas in Euripides' tragedy the bodies are present in the chariot, Eur. *Med.* 1377-88. This is also seen on a mid-fourth century Apulian vase (attributed to the Group of Oxford G269. Ruvo, Jatta Collection 1617) depicting Pentheus fight against the maeands where one of the latter is seen holding a sword contrary to the tragedy, and other vases, where the maenads tear him apart, see figure 126 in Shapiro 1994:176.

tragedy.⁴⁶ The painter then had to combine time and space in his representation resulting in a synoptic scene in which different episodes were combined. Still the episodes from the tragedy had to be depicted clearly enough for the spectator to be able to recognize it. This meant that it was the most spectacular moments or the main plot of the play which were chosen.⁴⁷ The latter alternative is, I suggest, what we see in the Toledo krater.

In the *Bacchae* Dionysos arrives in Thebes in order to establish his cult. His mission is to reveal himself "to mortals as the god whom she bore to Zeus". "She" is of course Semele. In his opening speech Dionysos relates how Semele was instantly killed by lightning when Zeus, her lover, revealed himself to her, not because Zeus wanted to kill her, but because no mortal may survive such an event. Her sisters, he continues, proceeded to spread lies about his mother after her death, saying that she had bore Dionysos to a mortal man and that Zeus had punished her for saying that he had anything to do with the child. For these lies Dionysos punished the sisters, but he takes the lies as his motivation for establishing his cult in Thebes and, from there, the rest of Greece, making it clear that he is ready to exact the same punishment on the city if they try to "drive the Bacchae down from the mountain".⁴⁸ In the *Bacchae*, then, Dionysos is establishing his cult by proving that he is a powerful god who punishes those who do not acknowledge him. His status as a god is of course dependent upon his father being Zeus and therefore he combines the establishment of his cult with the provision of honours for his mother. In this way the tragedy could be connected to the myth where Dionysos descends to Hades and brings his mother Semele up to Olympus where she takes over Hestia's place among the Olympian gods. This act confirmed the relationship between Semele and Zeus and thus Dionysos' divine

⁴⁶ Taplin 1993:23. Thus "[t]he painters draw on the tragedy but do not adhere to it; they are free of the temporal sequentiality of the play.", Taplin 1993:27. Arthur D. Trendall remarks that although scenes from plays rarely included a stage various "props" signal the theatrical influence, Trendall 1991:176-7. The use of such props could perhaps explain why Agave, on the Toledo krater, is seen leaning on a fountain.

⁴⁷ The majority of Apulian vases were made especially as grave goods, Schmidt 1996:448. However, this does not apply to all vases, and we do not know to what extent they were used prior to their interment. See Reusser 2002 I:48ff., 204 who argues that many of the Attic vases found in Etruscan graves were originally used in sanctuaries or in ordinary households.

⁴⁸ Eur. *Bacch.* 1-42 (tr. Stephen Esposito). Quote from line 51.

status. Thus the Darius painter combined the main theme from the *Bacchae* and strengthened it with a depiction of Dionysos in the Underworld agreeing with Hades that his mother's rightful place is on Olympos.

Another solution, which should be considered, is that the image on the Toledo krater refers to a now lost tragedy building upon Euripides' *Bacchae* or a local reperformance which included the katabasis of Dionysos as well as the known plot centered around Pentheus and Agave. The fact that vases whose images refer to lost tragedies and other plays are quite well attested from the circle of the Darius and the Underworld painters strengthens this possibility.⁴⁹

My suggestion, then, is that the scene on the Toledo krater refers both to the myth of Dionysos and Semele and to the *Bacchae* by Euripides or possibly to a later reworking of this tragedy by another writer. This accords well with the popularity of Euripides among Apulian vase painters. Nothing on the vase, except the possible connection between the two sides of the vase, points to a similar eschatological belief as that recorded in the Pelinna leaves, or in the Thurii leaves for that matter. That does not mean, however, that no eschatology was intended, but rather that it is difficult to pinpoint this as corresponding to a specific eschatological text. Possibly the vase had more than one function which could be combined and which strengthened each other. I have argued that this was done when the painter combined the myth of Dionysos and Semele with elements from Euripides' *Bacchae*, but it is also possible that the depictions acquired some more or less precise eschatological meaning at the time when the vase was placed in the grave. But we cannot be sure. In the Roman period we see that myths concerning Dionysos were fairly popular images on sarcophagi. Among the most frequent motifs are the Dionysiac "paradise" with the happy thiasos revelling among vines and ivy, but also the myth concerning Dionysos and Ariadne.⁵⁰ This shows that although Dionysos was often depicted on sarcophagi, and also appeared in texts such as the Hipponion gold leaf, the image of Dionysos could be taken from a popular myth which did not necessarily have anything to do with the deceased's afterlife. I thus find it safer to interpret the main scene more or less separated from the

⁴⁹ Trendall 1991:178-80.

⁵⁰ Lehmann-Hartleben 1942, table 47-8.

deceased and also separated from the vague eschatological beliefs of a cult from mainland Greece, a cult with which it is unlikely that the deceased or the Darius painter had any contact.

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